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ASSESSMENT ON THE STATUS OF LAND DEGRADATION IN ARID, SEMI-ARID AND DRY SUB-HUMID AREAS

LAND DEGRADATION ASSESSMENT IN DRYLANDS AND THE MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT

Note by the secretariat

1. At its fourth session, the Conference of the Parties (COP), by its decision 18/COP.4, requested the secretariat to continue following closely the activities of the projects on Dryland Degradation Assessment and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and to report on the progress of these two initiatives at the fifth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST).

2. This document provides an update of the information contained in ICCD/COP(5)/6 and ICCD/COP(5)/INF.6.

A. Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands

3. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) are collaborating in the project on Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA), which aims to provide basic standardized information and methodological tools for land degradation assessment at national, regional and global levels. The LADA project is being supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF); the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD are also key collaborators in this project.

4. The LADA objectives have the following major components: (i) to provide basic, standardized information, including maps, databases, etc. on the state of land degradation, its causes, its impacts on the environment and human society, and to identify best remedial measures to combat land degradation, at national, regional and global levels, (ii) to develop methods for land degradation assessment and monitoring at all levels, including methods for use by national organizations at local level, and (iii) to build capacities at all levels to enable the design and planning of interventions for mitigating land degradation and establish sustainable land use and management practices.

5. During the preparatory phase, the FAO was urged to take the leadership role, whilst ensuring full engagement by the other interested parties. A workshop on LADA, which was held in Rome in December 2000, recognized the need for the project to place land degradation in its broad and cross-cutting perspectives. The workshop gave strong support to the further elaboration of the LADA through preparation of a Project Development and Preparation Facility Block B (PDF-B), to be submitted to the GEF, leading towards early implementation of the project. UNEP in collaboration with the FAO submitted to the GEF secretariat in June 2001 the PDF-B proposal, which was approved for funding. The executing agency for this project will be the FAO.

B. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

6. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), which is already in preparation, and in which the UNCCD secretariat is one of the key collaborators, is a four year process designed to improve the management of the world's natural and managed ecosystems, by helping to provide policy-relevant scientific information on the condition of ecosystems, and options for appropriate responses. The MEA is a "multi-scale" assessment, comprised of a global component as well as a number of sub-global assessments being carried out at regional, national and local scales around the world.

7. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment was officially launched on 5 June 2001, coinciding with the World Environment Day. The study was launched to provide decision makers with authoritative scientific knowledge concerning the impact of changes to the world's ecosystems on human livelihoods and the environment. It will provide governments, the private sector and local organizations with better information about steps that can be taken to restore the productivity of the world's ecosystems.

8. During the first MEA technical design workshop, which was held in Bilthoven, the Netherlands, in April 2001, participants reviewed and revised the MEA conceptual framework. A set of activities to be undertaken during the design process, as well as outlines for the various working groups were identified. The second technical design workshop will take place in Cape Town, South Africa, on 8-11 October 2001, where the MEA outline will be developed, as well as proposals on how the various products and findings will be produced. The workshop will also deliberate on the timing and content of the various MEA products, as well as identifying members of the various working groups.

9. The MEA will be undertaken at multiple scales, and the design will consist of a global assessment as well as assessments of conditions and changes in ecosystems in individual communities, nations, and regions. A multi-scale cluster of assessments will be undertaken in Southern Africa and Southeast Asia, with the possibility of including additional regional clusters and separate assessments as the project progresses. The sub-global assessments will be designed to foster and build capacity for widespread adoption of integrated assessment approaches in other regions and nations.

10. A presentation on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment was made to the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology, during its meeting in Geneva on 15 August 2001. The Bureau noted with appreciation the presentation on the MEA, and considered a number of areas for potential collaboration between the MEA and the CST including the following: an assessment of land degradation, particularly at the national and local levels, without neglecting the global and sub-global levels, for a full comprehension of the relationships between them; institutional and human capacity development targeted towards issues of relevance to the Convention; increasing public awareness about the Convention; the development of benchmarks and indicators, particularly impact indicators; and the development of synergies between environmental conventions. In particular, Bureau members noted the need to identify impacts at the local level for relevance to the Convention.

11. Bureau members recommended that the CST, through well-defined and feasible mechanisms, should continue to identify and refine areas of collaboration with the MEA, either at country or regional levels.

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